

Nasher Sculpture Center Announces Nasher Public: Robert Barsamian

Using hanging fabric panels, sculpture, and sound, the artist tells a story of human tragedy and perseverance.

DALLAS, Texas (July 20, 2023) – The Nasher Sculpture Center announces *Veils of Sorrow*, an installation by Robert Barsamian incorporating drawing, collage, sculpture, sound, and performance that explores the strength of the human spirit and the possibility of healing in the wake of unspeakable tragedy. The installation is on view in the Nasher’s Public Gallery from July 22 to September 24, 2023.

An artist of Armenian heritage, Barsamian draws on published research and the experiences of his grandmother—a survivor of the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire (1915–1921)—to shed light on the twentieth century’s first non-colonial genocide, which scholars widely agree resulted in the deaths of up to a million Armenians.

Veils of Sorrow presents a series of fabric panels with images of figures that the artist derived from collaging photographs and drawings he made or collected from a variety of sources, including cast plaster figurines in Mexico, anatomical drawings from medical texts, art mannequins, and art historical references. The figures, some tethered to weights or to each other, seem to float on backgrounds of variegated blues suggesting stylized reflections of water, placing the viewer in the midst of an aquatic environment. A small wooden boat suspended from the ceiling makes clear that the viewer is also submerged. The effect is both unnerving and strangely calming, drawing on the archetypal duality of water, both destructive as well as life-giving and renewing.

The installation takes as its point of departure reports of mass drownings in the Black Sea near Trebizond (now Trabzon in what is now Turkey) in 1915 in order to examine the broader existential questions it begs: how can human beings commit such inhumane acts and how can humanity survive and heal?

In addition to the surreal environment of floating figures, the gallery also features an unusual wooden instrument made by the artist called a semantron. The semantron was used in Eastern European and Orthodox Catholic monasteries to call monks to worship. While it predates bells, churches and monasteries in the Ottoman Empire reverted to the semantron when the ringing of bells was outlawed under Islamic rule, thus making the simple, wooden planks an unassuming symbol of subversion and perseverance. The instrument can also be seen as a source of healing through connections with music, prayer, and culture.

University of North Texas musician Kayla Liptak will perform on the semantron at the private opening of the installation on July 22. Performances will be free and open to the public on September 9 at 3 p.m., and at the installation’s close on September 24 at 5 p.m. A recording of her playing will call visitors to the installation daily at noon and again just before the close of the Nasher at 5 p.m.

Robert Barsamian will give a public artist talk on September 9 at 2 p.m. at the Nasher. Tickets are free but registration is required. Please visit the Nasher’s website to reserve your seat.

To attend the opening reception and performance on July 22 from 5-7pm, please email alichliter@nashersculpturecenter.org

About Robert Barsamian

Robert Barsamian was born into a close-knit Armenian community in Whitinsville, Massachusetts in 1947, the son and grandson of survivors of the 1915 Armenian Genocide. A studio art major at Massachusetts College of Art, Barsamian went on to receive his M.A. in 1971 from the State University of New York at Albany. After moving to Dallas in the early 1980s, he first came to prominence for his paintings and drawings of figures in swimming pools, characterized by beautifully rendered effects of light and water.

Over the past five decades, Barsamian has been featured in numerous solo and group exhibitions in the United States and abroad. He has held numerous teaching positions with academic institutions across the country including the Massachusetts College of Art, Boston; State University of New York, Albany; School of Visual Arts, New York; Southern Methodist University, Dallas; El Centro Community College, Dallas; University of North Texas, Denton; and University of Texas at Arlington; as well as the South Dallas Cultural Center and Project Row Houses, Houston.

Teaching and community involvement have been integral to Barsamian's practice. He has held numerous teaching positions with academic institutions across the country and served as guest lecturer or artist-in-residence in over 30 organizations since 1971, including over a decade at the South Dallas Cultural Center and two residencies at Project Row Houses in Houston. From 1992 through 1995, Barsamian was a design artist for Dallas Area Rapid Transit's Art Program where he designed tile patterns using historical images from nearby archeological digs in two 300-foot-long tunnels as well as a 100-foot-long drop from grade level to train platform at the Cityplace/Uptown station. Barsamian has exhibited locally at Conduit Gallery since 1988.

Barsamian's work is held in a number of public collections including The Tyler Museum, Tyler, TX; the Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York; the Asilah Art Museum, Asilah, Morocco; the State University of New York at Albany; and Western New Mexico University, Silver City, NM.

Images can be found in the press kit linked below. Installation images of *Veils of Sorrow* will be added by July 28.

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/rtpfznx0qi0ybs48r60b0/h?rlkey=qv38n5mr6ugw8rlpboaulfzf&dl=0>

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About the Nasher Sculpture Center:

Located in the heart of the Dallas Arts District, the Nasher Sculpture Center is home to the Raymond and Patsy Nasher Collection, one of the finest collections of modern and contemporary sculpture in the world, featuring more than 300 masterpieces by Brancusi, Calder, de Kooning, di Suvero, Giacometti, Basquiat, Hepworth, LeWitt, Matisse, Miró, Moore, Picasso, Rodin, Serra, and Shapiro, among others. The Nasher Sculpture Center is open Wednesday through Sunday from 11 am to 5 p.m. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$7 for seniors, \$5 for students, and free for children 12 and under and members, and includes access to special exhibitions.

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For more information, visit www.NasherSculptureCenter.org.

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