



MARTIN BAROOSHIAN

ARTWORK TRUST



Revelation by Martin Barooshian, 1960

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MEDIA BACKGROUNDER • CRITICAL CONTEXT

Artist: Martin Barooshian (1929–2022)

Featured Work: *Revelation* (1960; oil on canvas)

MEDIA SUMMARY

The Art-Historical Shockwave of 1960: Martin Barooshian's *Revelation*

Following its recent acquisition by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), Martin Barooshian's 1960 masterpiece, *Revelation*, is receiving long-overdue institutional recognition. *Revelation*, is a wild, maximalist alternative to mainstream postwar American modernism. While mid-century critics demanded formalist reduction, Barooshian was moving in the opposite direction. He engineered a dense, explosive "image-system" that fused biblical apocalypse with modernist painting, Cold War dread, pop culture, and psychological intensity. Though embedded within the mid-century NYC art scene, Barooshian was not included in its dominant institutional circles. Consequently, this painting stands as a brilliant, uncontextualized framework—carrying the exact visual inputs of later contemporary developments, completely unburdened by art-world labels. His resistance to these orthodoxies now reads as pure prescience.

FIVE HIGH-IMPACT STORY ANGLES

1. The Living, Breathing Canvas as a Generative System (Narrative and Visual Mechanics):

Revelation functions like a shape-shifting organism, completely abandoning static, linear storytelling. This marks a radical evolution from Barooshian's sequential woodcut *Revelations of St. John Suite* (1952), turning structured biblical text into a simultaneous, non-linear cosmological field. When viewing *Revelation*, one sees a single biomorphic form transforming into a mask, a flame, an anatomical organ, or a cosmic portal depending on where the viewer focuses. Meaning is produced through scale, rhythm, spatial pressure, and texture and color, creating a volatile field where forms never fully settle—pushing the viewer into a continuous cycle of discovery.

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2. The High-Low Melting Pot (Art-Historical and Cultural Synthesis):

Revelation synthesizes a vast, almost inexhaustible range of high and low culture. It seamlessly absorbs elements of Renaissance masters, surrealism, symbolism, and Armenian-American identity—while pulling equally from cinema, sci-fi, and comic book graphics—collapsing a massive lexicon of global and pop-cultural influences into a single, electric visual field.

3. The Geopolitical Apocalypse of 1960 (Historical Context / Cold War Anxieties):

While themes of destruction and renewal also stem deeply from Barooshian's Armenian heritage, they find a separate, immediate outlet in the global anxieties of 1960. *Revelation* captures the raw energy of its historical moment, channeling Cold War tensions, nuclear fears, the early Space Age, social unrest, and ecological breakdown into a volatile cosmic landscape. Rather than offering literal political commentary, Barooshian exposes this fractured world and raw psychological climate, implicating viewers in its chaotic energy and leaving them to navigate its profound uncertainties.

4. The Missing Mid-Century Trajectory (Canonic Revision / Contemporary Precedents):

The standard narrative of mid-century art focuses entirely on Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, and Pop Art. *Revelation* shatters this trinity. It introduces a richer, stranger, and far more exciting artistic journey that is deeply figurative, psychological, and global. It serves as a vital blueprint for contemporary practice. The specific language Barooshian committed to—biomorphic form, symbolic figuration, deep interiority, and oblique narrative—is precisely what a vital strand of contemporary art is articulating today.

5. The 70-Year Secret Cosmology: Postwar Art's Hidden World-Builder (Artist Profile/Lifetime Durational Project):

How should we understand the paradox of an outwardly unassuming artist who, largely outside public view, spent seven decades constructing an extensive and deeply idiosyncratic symbolic universe—and why did an achievement of this scale remain hidden in plain sight? Martin Barooshian built what may prove to be one of the most ambitious, extensive, and internally coherent personal cosmologies in postwar American art. His 1960 painting, *Revelation*, represents a key event and early lynchpin in what would become this lifelong artistic experiment. While working as a schoolteacher and after largely retreating from the commercial NYC art world in 1970, he quietly continued to execute a massive durational experiment across painting, printmaking, and drawing. Shifting from biomorphic visionscapes to stark black-and-whites to dot-driven neopointillism, his diverse styles functioned as a sophisticated, generative system designed to endlessly mutate this private universe, leaving behind a massive, unexhibited creative empire that offers art journalists a rare opportunity to explore a compelling untold story.

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CRITICAL SUB-FOCUS: THE ERASED BOUNDARIES OF MEDIA

The Myth of Medium Purity

Barooshian refused to accept one of postwar art history's favorite rules: pigeonholing artists as either painters or printmakers. His practice was entirely fluid and integrated. He bypassed the predictable routes—neither forcing print concepts onto a canvas nor using paint to decorate a matrix. To Barooshian, drawing, painting, and printmaking were never separate disciplines. They were interchangeable expressions of one unified creative intelligence.

Story Highlights:

- **No Hierarchy of Art Form:**

In Barooshian's ecosystem, a painting is not superior to a print. They are parallel states of the exact same deep visual investigation.

- **The Operational Logic:**

The sharp incisions, layered color separations, and variable states on the canvas of *Revelation* are not "tricks" borrowed from printmaking. They are the natural vocabulary of an artist who thought simultaneously in the physical media of print workshops and painting studios.

- **Ahead of the Post-Media Curve:**

By treating all disciplines as a single, open continuum, Barooshian anticipated today's boundary-blurring contemporary art world by decades. He wasn't merely mixing materials; he was working in an early post-medium state—refusing to let the physical canvas limit a vast cross-media narrative.